

Hotel transformed from old Tahoe into new



The lobby is also known as the living room. Photo/Matt Bolt

By Kathryn Reed

Modern and minimalist intersect with high quality and relaxed at one of South Lake Tahoe's newest motels.

The Green Lantern is now the Coachman Hotel.

Justin Watzka has taken what was a rundown hotel in the Stateline area that looked like it hadn't been renovated since it opened in the 1960s and has turned it into a three-star hotel that is already attracting guests even though construction is not done.

Last weekend 15 rooms were rented. The grand opening is slated for June. To date 30 of the 42 rooms have been renovated. There are 15 layouts. Depending on the time of year, rooms are

likely to run between \$125 and \$220 a night.

In the 1980s the Green Lantern and Royal Coachman became one hotel. Watzka in naming his venture kept some of that history. While the property has driveways on Pine Boulevard and Manzanita Avenue, Pine is the main entrance.



Rooms at the Coachman Hotel come with king or queen beds.
Photo/Matt Bolt

Watzka bought the 1.1 acres last April for \$1.3 million. Since that time he infused “multiple millions” of dollars to transform the property.

“I want to do more projects in the future, so this has to last,” Watzka told Lake Tahoe News while on a tour of the site. He’s here for the long haul, not to just sell the hotel once it’s truly launched.

His background is in the lodging industry, having worked for Marriott Vacation Club for a number of years. He recently earned his MBA. In August, he moved to South Lake Tahoe full time.

Watzka has relied on his dad, Peter, for some expertise. The elder Watzka has spent his entire career in the hospitality business. Brother Garrett, who owns Duvin Design clothing company, has been tasked with creating apparel for the hotel to sell to guests.

The guest experience is what Watzka is focused on. He believes 20- to 50-year-olds from the Bay Area and Sacramento will be his market. It will be people who like to play outdoors. Heavenly Mountain Resort and Lakeside Beach are within walking distance. So are the Stateline casinos.

The lobby, which also is a bit like a living room where guests can relax in a variety of seating areas while enjoying a coffee, beer or wine, is where a garage used to be. Baristas use Stumptown coffee from Portland. Beers go for \$5 – with Great Basin, Sierra Nevada, Kona and Stella available. The wines have not been selected yet, but Watzka wants them to come from innovative, young vintners.

Instead of a separate check-in area, it is combined with where people can purchase those hot and cold drinks.

The alder counter has been stained to look like it is walnut. Wood is a common theme throughout the property.

Adjacent to the lobby-living room is the breakfast area. A continental breakfast, including a waffle station, is complimentary.

Outside the shared space is a tiered seating area with large gas fire pits. On top of the lobby-living room is a roof deck that in nicer weather will have seating. The original pool will be overhauled and ready for summer. A new hot tub is already operational.

Concrete floors are throughout the property – even in the rooms. A rubber flooring is on top of this in the rooms, which is ideal for when people haul in their ski gear or sand from

the beach.

Instead of closets, a bar is in the vanity area of the bathroom where clothes could be hung. There's also a rack for skis that could double to hang wet jackets or swim suits.

The old hotel lobby, which had a manager's unit behind it, is now a spacious three-bedroom family unit that can sleep 11.



The fire pits are just outside the “living room” at the Coachman. Photo/Matt Bolt

Sierra Sustainable Builders is the general contractor. Workers essentially took the innards down to the studs. New electrical is throughout, with plenty of outlets for people's gadgets.

The bathrooms are small, but the showers are decent size. They are about the length of a bathtub – and there are no tubs. Shampoo, soap and conditioner are in bulk dispensers, which Watzka said allows for a higher quality product – Malin+Goetz – to be used.

A touch not often found even at high-end hotels is heated toilet seats.

That is all part of Watzka's desires to not be ordinary, have little upgrades and still be affordable.

The rooms, some as small as 200-square-feet, are functional and cozy. Beds are either queens or kings. Apple TVs are in each room – another one of those upgrades Watzka wants to be known for.

“The guests' comfort is No. 1,” Watzka said.